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Charles Ewing Sheppard,
1846-1939

CHARLES EWING
SHEPPARD
1846 - - 1939

By JAMES MEADE LANDIS

Being a *TRUE ACCOUNT OF HIS TIMES* and *LIFE AS LAWYER GENEALOGIST* and *HISTORICA OF CUMBERLAND COUNTY, NEW JERSEY INCLUDING A LIKENESS FROM A PHOTOGRAPH TAKEN IN 1924 BY THE PHILLIPS STUDIO IN PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA.*

Published in Vineland, New Jersey
by the VINELAND HISTORICAL and
ANTIQUARIAN SOCIETY, MCMXXXIX

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Charles Ewing Sheppard

Lawyer—Genealogist—Historian
A Brief Sketch of His Life and Times

By James Meade Landis

Charles Ewing Sheppard, the great South Jersey genealogist was born in Bridgeton, New Jersey, at 5 o'clock on the frosty morning of November 1st, 1846, the last of eight children. All but one lived well beyond man's allotted three score years and ten.

The family home was on the north side of old Point Street (now Washington) about twenty yards from Bank and his advent helped dispel the gloom that settled deeply there when a tiny brother, just three months before, was called to an infant's bright eternity.

His father was Ephraim Elmer Sheppard,* a liveryman by trade, a Baptist and a staunch Democrat who was to suffer for his politics and be often rewarded by his party. His honors included two terms as Associate Judge of the Court of Common Pleas, when it was the practice for three judges, two of them of the laity, to sit upon that bench. Uncle Ephraim, as he was called by all the town, named his boy Charles Ewing, a tribute to the great Chief Justice, whom he much admired.

The Bridgeton into which this child was born, rapidly emerging from its rural and isolated state, was just then taking on some semblance of the relative commercial importance it had assumed by the time he came of age. It claimed three thousand inhabitants, including probably forty still nominally slaves, and except for these, the population was almost purely Scotch-Irish. The people were fairly prosperous, too, for the Cumberland Iron and Nail Works, discoverers of a way to make better nails from worse iron, was a stable commercial success and

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* Ephraim Elmer Sheppard (Abner, Ephraim, David Jr., David) was born Oct. 2, 1804, married, May 1, 1828, Jane Elizabeth Dare (David, William, William, William, Capt. William); of their eight children Charles Ewing was the youngest.

The Vineland Historical Society has among its pamphlets the "Eighteenth Annual Catalogue of the Officers and Students in the University at Lewisbugh" for 1867-8 in which the name of Charles E. Sheppard appears in the sophomore class.

Some of the attending expenses may be of interest and explain fully why the three scholarships won by Mr. Sheppard spelled affluence; they may, also, stir some envy in the heart of the modern parent.

Tuition in College,	$36.	per annum
Board, room and gas,	3.10	per week
Fuel for public rooms,	1.50	per term
Fuel for public rooms,	5.	per term
Care of rooms	.50	per term
Average for repairs,	1.	per term
Washing, per dozen,	.38	

Mr. Sheppard married, June 19, 1889, Mary Frances Carll. He died February 18, 1939, in his Bridgeton home which is still occupied by Mrs. Sheppard and the daughter Miss Helen D. Sheppard; the son, Charles C. Sheppard resides in Collingswood, N. J.—Editor.

glass was being manufactured in larger and ever larger quantities.

The great influences in the community were three,—the Presbyterian Church, the Cumberland Bank, and the Elmer Family.

Especially in its moral tone, the seat of Cumberland County in 1846 and until well after the Civil War was a curious combination of a New England theocracy and an easygoing antebellum Southern town. It shows certain southern characteristics still.

It was the Bridgeton, never-the-less, which had sent the debaters of a hundred stirring issues to the Continental Congress, the town which furnished United States Senators and Judges of an ability and influence all out of proportion to their obscure port of registry; trustees to Princeton, and by general agreement one of New Jersey's most distinguished legal minds and purest judges, the Honorable Lucius Q. C. Elmer.

To understand, even superficially, the subject of this brief sketch, it is necessary that we disinter the town of three-quarters of a century ago and re-examine the forces which caused its sons to occupy for instance the Governorship for twenty-one years. The infant Sheppard, since he lived more than a generation beyond his generation was destined to be a unique holdover from this more virile and competitive era, a time of intense individualism and, especially in politics, blind partisanship carried to incredibly bitter extremes. Cast in such a mold he was to be, especially in the softer times of his later life, a man much misunderstood.

Though somewhat off the beaten track there was always a disposition among the people of West Jersey to encourage education. This was a natural consequence of their Puritan background. Quakers, too, never sniffed at booklearning, so there is no significance attachable to young Charles' public schooling and nothing remarkable in his ambition for a collegiate education. Hadn't Bridgeton's clergymen been Yale and Princeton men since the early 18th century—their doctors Philadelphia trained?

Uncle Ephraim helped his youngest with a little cash. The boy helped himself too, and earned the commendation of a pious and for that time wealthy Baptist family and they bestowed on him three scholarships worth $100 each, so he was adequately launched at Bucknell, then called Lewisburg Academy.

To have inspired such a munificent gift he must have shown by that time signs of the brilliance which caused the president

of Brown University and a group of the professors there, to so highly recommend his abilities that President Edward Parrish, of Swarthmore College in a series of letters urged him to take a chair there, even though "since we are Quakers, and Hicksites, there would be no opportunity for thee, a Baptist to enjoy religious communion amongst us." He never mentioned this, nor his record at Brown for he stood Number Two in his class—and he never liked to be Number Two in anything.

I now quote Mr. Sheppard, the notes from my journal:

"I entered Lewisburg in the Fall of '66. Our class numbered but fifteen or sixteen. It was at the close of the war you understand and conditions were unsettled.

"The president of the Academy was Justin R. Loomis, D.D., a courtly, old-fashioned gentleman. He always wore a blue swallowtail coat with large flat brass buttons. He was an able man but Oh! how pigheaded!

"His pigheadedness actually broke up our class and was the cause of my going to Brown University for my fourth college year.

"We had three terms a year at Lewisburg. During the last term, which started in March, it was customary for the Junior Class to give an entertainment called the Junior Exhibition, and the affair had always been enlivened by the music of a brass band.

"The expenses of these exercises including the band were assumed by the Junior Class,—but we were so few we thought we would soften the financial blow by substituting a string band in place of the brass.

"We broached the subject to Dr. Loomis. He exploded. In spite of our pleas of poverty and they were justified, he insisted that the brass band be engaged.

"Engaged it was, and so angry were the boys that a number declared then and there their intention of leaving, taking up a certificate of competence and finishing elsewhere.

"Four of us did leave and I remember vividly my experience at the hands of the Doctor when I went to his house for my certificate.

"I planned to get the paper in hand and then give him a blast. But when I told him what I'd come for—that I had decided to go elsewhere to finish,—he was so gracious and reasonable in his conversation, so courtly in his manner as he bowed me in and out of the house and wished me well,—I was completely defeated—I was undone for fair!

"Although I had to make up three of four subjects not re-

quired at Lewisburg, I was admitted to the Senior class at Brown without examination. I received my A.B. in the Spring of 1870, my Masters degree three years later."

It was characteristic of him that his diplomas never saw a frame. He continues:

"To do this extra work required application. My roommate, a shap named Derr, was an up-state farm boy who was used to going to bed early, and did. Our stated study period was from 7 to 9 P.M. Derr was always in bed by 9 which left the balance of the night to me undisturbed. I often studied all night. Derr, true to his upbringing, arose at 5 and picked up where I'd left off."

Mr. Sheppard said that the close application necessary during this period provided a mental disciplining which stood him in good stead all the rest of his life.

"Most of the students ate at boarding houses in the town. I was one of a group of ten who walked a mile into the country, breakfast, dinner and supper, to a farmer's table where we got excellent food and cheap. It was a six mile daily tramp and bad in wet and cold weather but we neither seem to have minded it nor to have really thought about it.

"In the colleges then, there was much stress on oratory and debating was the great thing. Everyone argued—everyone debated. My club was EUEPIA and many a hard-fought battle I engaged in. I liked it and I suppose this influenced my choice of the professions 'though I have no recollection of having made any deliberate preparation for the law."

The young man's public school and college years were not devoid of work at home and plenty of it, for most of the cash expense he had to contrive to earn himself.

One of his regular tasks for which he received hard cash was driving the omnibus from the old Irving Avenue Station to the Davis House; that, and piloting drummers through the country in the rigs furnished by his father's livery. He recalled a trip as a lad to a point north of Millville at the instance of a customer who wanted to see "the place where the new town was going to be." Both the fare and the lad who drove him laughed and laughed because the place was just scruboaks and sand. The same boy, past 90, recalled this first visit whenever he entered Vineland and never failed to mention with awe the Founder and his vision.

While Bridgeton was welcoming German immigrants, chopping out better nails, blowing better bottles, it was also becoming more and more animated politically.

Boasting one of the earliest advocates of the abolition of slavery in its then long dead Col. Eli Elmer, the town was seized with a paroxysm of patriotic fervor when war finally came. The flag was hardly down at Sumter before a very sizable quota of the local eligibles were pledged to the army; by Gettysburg the county seat in proportion to its size had sent more men against the South than any other town in the Union save one. Haverhill, Massachusetts, sent a few more.

It wasn't exactly a happy hunting ground for Southern sympathizers. Still there were some. Uncle Ephraim Sheppard was one. He was a man of deep personal convictions and the most powerful arguments did not prevail against them.

Many and bitter were the arguments the Sheppard boy heard. He was often to make his way home, crimson but defiant, followed by a shoal of taunting half-growns, intoning "Copperhead" in the diabolical singsong that only a small boy can accomplish.

Often there was talk of tar and feathers and even hemp for Eph Sheppard. They years afterward made him Mayor.

One prominent Democrat openly aided the Union cause. He was the privileged Judge Elmer who personally placed a New Testament in the hands of each departing soldier. The talk this caused reflected a mixed opinion.

But for the best gauge of the temper of the times consider the sad case of the Rev. Dr. Samuel Beach Jones, spiritual leader of that rock of intellectual Christianity, the First Presbyterian Church of Bridgeton.

This man was from Charleston, South Carolina, but was educated in the north, graduated at Yale in 1832, Princeton Theological Seminary two years later. Only Father Ethan Osborn, a Presbyterian preacher of an earlier vintage excelled him in spiritual influence. Osborn couldn't hold a candle to him socially.

Regard the following, from "A History and Handbook of The First Presbyterian Church, Bridgeton, N. J., 1892" published by order of the congregation:

> "His learning, his eminent qualities of leadership, his social position, his charming manners, his commanding presence, his resonant voice, his oratorical powers—these combined with simple and devout piety made his (Dr. Jones') influence felt throughout the entire Presbyterian Church."

They could have said South Jersey.

But Jones, head and heart with the South, failed to pray for the success of the Union arms, was ranked as a Copperhead, some said Number One because of his influence. So he quit his pulpit "under gentle pressure" after 24 years of loving and being loved by his congregation, retired to the old Giles mansion on Broad street, which he owned.

Young Charles Sheppard, a precocious youngster, who admired him much and often in his company silently shared his misery, acquired many of his books, received his bookcases and his best daguerreotype portrait.

One outspoken gentleman, of sufficient worth to be afterwards twice Mayor, was interned at Fort Delaware, from whence he saw hundreds of his fellow prisoners, victims of Cholera and the yellow jack, shipped to Finn's Point on the Jersey shore, where their corpses helped to fill a common grave. He was John Smalley, elected first in 1881.

Feeling ran high when news reached the County of the assassination of President Lincoln. It precipitated a near-riot and Charley Sheppard, soon due for college, took part:

"Bridgeton, though a supporter of the Union, had a number of outspoken Southern sympathizers.

" The nearest thing to a bloody riot ever seen in these parts I witnessed. In fact a member of my family was more or less a direct cause of it.

"Mr. Lincoln was shot on a Friday night and died on Saturday morning.

"On the morning he died there was a great gathering of men and boys on the pavement in front of the Davis House.

"The hotel stood pretty well back from the street there on the Cumberland Bank corner, facing south. Beside the flagstones from the edge of the porch to the street, there was the porch itself, maybe ten feet deep—with big pillars which ran to the top of the house. You see there was a big space and it was full.

"When the news reached Bridgeton of the president's death it caused a stir and several Democrats made imprudent remarks.

"One of these was George Elwell, who married a sister of mine. It was reported that someone said to him, 'George, Lincoln's dead.' He is supposed to have replied in effect that 'twas a pity it wasn't sooner.

"It wasn't long before this remark of George's, I dare say stepped up a little, too, was circulated about and when it reached the crowd at the hotel there was angry muttering.

"One of the glibbest talkers of the town was a man named Eddie B——. He 'organized' the crowd then and there, had a 'Committee' appointed, which was charged with calling upon the Copperheads, warning them out of town by the next day at sundown.

"The first call the 'Chairman' proposed they make was upon George Elwell. He lived in half a small double house on North Pearl Street next the lane by the old McGear property.

"My father heard of it, for the Committee met and fired up at Davis' bar, not far from the livery office.

"He ran all the way from Cohansey street to George's house, the stable shotgun in his hand.

"Father got to the house just ahead of the Committee, and when they were just inside the gate, he stepped out on the stoop, both barrels of the gun cocked and primed.

"That crowd couldn't say a word—just stood stock still. Finally one did ask if George was home and father said 'What's your errand?' Then they filed out.

"Ed McGear saw the whole thing from a tree nearby. He told many a time how the Committee was set way back on its haunches, for they knew Uncle Eph was bad enough even without a shotgun!"

"Word spread like wildfire down into the County. Early the next day from Mauricetown came a hackload of Democrats, most of them elderly men, all armed and mostly with shotguns, some with forks. Other groups came in from down below and a large crowd from Greenwich, all armed, and that night, Tuesday, the pavement in front of Davis' hotel was ours.

"Yes, I was there. We had an old rusty pistol in our woodshed, and I burnished her up with grit from under the rainspout. I had her loaded, too.

"Every once in awhile one of the other party would appear, some curious, some just ignorant of what had happened. They'd be sent home with an escort."

In that day a man not a political partisan was a nonenity, and "active in politics" was not an empty phrase. This condition was universal, therefore there was no occasion to include it in the trilogy of great social influences. A leading politician, especially during and just after the Civil War, was apt to bear the very real marks of his leadership to his grave,—if not of body, certainly of soul. Judge Ephraim Elmer Sheppard was one of these—his lawyer son another.

The strongest single influence in the life of Charles E. Sheppard was brought to bear by the aging Lucius Q. C. Elmer,

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the demi-Democrat and pious Presbyterian whose Testaments lay mouldering in uncounted soldier's graves.

Together with the late William A. Logue, Esq., and a lad named Gregory, young Sheppard had the benefit weekly of a two hour lecture on law which according to the old Judge, was of a brand not to be found in the books. Judge Elmer, then retired, was a Common Law lawyer with a hearty contempt for any other kind and he inculcated this feeling in his cubs. The Sheppard boy was always inordinately proud of having sat at Judge Elmer's feet, of having been what he himself called a "first principles" man. This, it should be noted, was only one of the Elmer influences. It was by no means the greatest.

His legal clerkship was served in the busy office of Judge James R. Hoagland, who forgot all about his student until the afternoon of the day before he was to appear at Trenton before Chief Justice Mercer Beasley for a viva voce examination.

"In one respect," the student admitted 60 years later, "my choice of a training ground might have been disastrous. He only quizzed me once. Judge Hoagland seated himself in one of those old-fashioned high backed office chairs. It was late afternoon. He picked at random from Blackstone for perhaps 20 minutes when he said I'd 'do'. His was a sterling character and his office a splendid school. He had most of the Democrat business at that time, for Judge Elmer was then retired."

So Charles E. Sheppard became a first-principles lawyer, by common agreement a foremost authority while in active practice upon Municipal Law and the descent of property. Certain stories connected with his court work, especially his resourcefulness have become legendary. It was generally agreed that to oppose him without the most exhaustive and painstaking preparation was to court disaster. He was, like many lawyers however, a great procrastinator.

He became widely known as a reform lawyer, a foe of liquor, gambling, vice and Sabbath desecration, especially early in the nineteen hundreds as counsel for the Law and Order League of New Jersey.

Parenthetically, the following question and answer is interesting:

"Mr. Sheppard, considering the man from every possible angle, who do you regard as the finest lawyer you have known in your lifetime?"

"I can answer that without reflection: William E. Potter from every standpoint. He was my ideal of a lawyer and a gentleman."

Colonel Potter was not only a Republican, but South Jersey's most distinguished soldier, relentless harrier of the Copperheads.

Charlie Sheppard took to politics as naturally as a fish takes to water. Besides it was then, even more than now, a natural adjunct of his profession. During the latter part of the nineteenth and well into the present century, he "looked after" his party when a Democrat, especially in Bridgeton was almost as rare a bird as the Dodo. Handbills survive testifying to the bitterness of the hopeless campaigns he helped to wage.

But it wasn't Elmer's masterful exposition of Coke upon Littleton which most influenced young Sheppard, but that honorable gentleman's harmless creatures of an old age leisure, "Brief Notices of Old Residents of Cumberland." These biographies filled as they were with genealogy and old time lore fired the young man's imagination,—started a blaze of interest which burned undiminished and unchecked for over 70 years. This was Elmer influence Number Two. Sheppard virtually made his avocation his vocation and brought to the science of genealogy a trained intellect coupled to a body as strong as his mind. Add to such a fortunate combination a singleness of purpose and a time stretch of just short of three quarters of a century and the magnitude of his accomplishments will be better appreciated.

All he desired from his profession he said, was a living for his family, and man never occupied his time more as he pleased than he. His pleasure was the past.

A genealogist often travels far afield in search of data. He liked to tell of an incident which occurred on a trip he made to Ohio early in his experience. To reach his destination he was forced to make a five mile hike from a flag station, but "accepted" a ride from a farm boy. His benefactors name was Sheppard,—Charles E., and he visited with the family for several days. They were related.

Accuracy and completeness almost an obsession, he left no stone unturned to make perfect his knowledge, many times, even in his extreme old age, taxing the strength of those who accompanied him on his expeditions.

An expert in cross-examination, he brought the benefit of his abilities into the field of genealogy and when a person had been questioned upon the subject of his forebears or locality his subject's little well of knowledge was completely dry.

His was a familiar figure in Clerk's Office and Surrogate's vault for three generations. The opinion has been expressed

that he had at some time copied every document recorded there of any current use in history or genealogy, and this in addition to the work incident to the practice of law. He drew a remarkably accurate map freehand, that is to say without the use of instruments of any kind. Needless to say his knowledge of the basic surveys and titles to land in South Jersey was unsurpassed.

As an historian Charles E. Sheppard's reputation will rest upon his County history printed in 1883 by Evarts and Peck. Published in conjunction with that of Gloucester and Salem Counties, it contained no romantic imaginings but was checked against original sources fact by fact. This caused it to be the occasioning of a vast amount of research and plain hard work. The entire edition was sold in advance by subscription at a substantial price and those which survive have almost all found their way into libraries, historical and genealogical societies. It is now a rare book.

He also prepared the Cumberland County material for "South Jersey, A History," issued by the Lewis Publishing Company.

A member of the ancient family, he collected over a period of many years a vast amount of Dare data from which it had been his intention to compile a magnificent family chronicle. This task will now fall to someone else. A long thought upon genealogical expedition to Scotland in the interest of his Sheppard line never materialized.

Persons of a similar avocation treasured Charles E. Sheppard's acquaintance, and well they might, for his word was the last word on the old families of South Jersey. This was a matter of fact recognized literally from coast to coast. His mind, his manuscripts and records were open, though, to all who personally called at 91 Broad, a property he held, it is interesting to note, under a 999 year lease. His mind was as rich a storehouse as his library and when his light went out there perished a vast treasure of those historical and genealogical trifles which cannot be committed to paper. He retained many of the little quirks of speech and manner from days gone by still using in greeting the archaic "heigh-o," which he pronounced "hay-o," in the manner of his soldier grandfather, a veteran of the Revolution. In these respects he was a fascinating hold-over from the past, a human anachronism in the most felicitous sense of the word.

Many were the addresses made and pamphlets supervised and written; many were the historical "mistakes" he turned the light upon.

And all this in addition to a great variety of other interests and accomplishments: he bound books, patented a strawberry called the Sheppard Seedling, could expertly rush a chair-seat, once owned two three-masted schooners and a sloop. He was historian of the Dare Family Association, a trustee of the West New Jersey Baptist Association, member of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, dean of the Cumberland County Bar, President Emeritus of the Cumberland County Historical Society, Honorary member Vineland Historical & Antiquarian Society, and last of his class at Brown.

All at once he became aware of his failing mechanism, sure he would not reach his cherished goal—a hundred birthday. As he sat one day with a friend, he sadly contemplated his hands, no longer capable of writing. He turned suddenly and asked, "Did you ever think deeply, as I am doing now, upon this endless progression from infancy to old age—on and on—and on?"

In a week he was dead. This was his thanatopsis.

In New England, where old wealth—and shall we say a cultured leisure?—go hand in hand, Charles E. Sheppard, Genealogist, would have been famous. Here, in his lifetime he was merely well known.

But it shall not always be so. The home he loved, the families he chronicled, are increasingly aware of their honorable past.

Nearly a score of thick, red-bound manuscript volumes will be this ancient's memorial, more eloquent and probably more enduring than marble or molded bronze, for as long as Jerseymen look back to the homes and the graves of their ancestors, so long shall his fame increase, his memory be green.

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